



# How to Handle an Emergency Situation

User  
Reviewed

Three Methods: [Assessing the Emergency](#) [Handling the Emergency](#) [Being Prepared](#)

An emergency situation is any situation that poses an immediate threat to a person's health, security, property, or environment. Knowing how to assess the signs that make up an emergency will help you know how to handle it. In addition, being well-prepared for an emergency will pay off when it's time to handle any emergency situation.

Method  
1

## Assessing the Emergency

**1 Remain calm.** Although emergencies require rapid action, the most important factor in effectively handling the situation is to keep calm. If you find yourself becoming confused or anxious, stop what you're doing. Take a deep breath. Remember that to be *calm in a stressful situation* you must deliberately adjust your behavior.<sup>[1]</sup>

- The reason you feel panicked in an emergency is the result of your body's automatic overproduction of the stress hormone cortisol. The cortisol goes to the brain and slows down the pre-frontal cortex, which is the region responsible for planning complex action.
- By overriding your body's reaction, you can continue to access your critical thinking faculties. You won't be responding from emotion, but from rational thought.

**2 Determine the nature of the emergency.** What signs indicate that there is an emergency? Is this a medical emergency, or is there a threat to the property/building that may result in human injury? It's important to stop and take inventory of the situation calmly before reacting to the emergency.<sup>[2]</sup>

- An injury due to motor vehicle accident, or smoke inhalation or burns from a fire are examples of medical emergency situations.
- A medical emergency consists of sudden physical symptoms, such as intense bleeding, head trauma, loss of consciousness, chest pain, choking, sudden dizziness or weakness.
- Intense desire to hurt yourself or someone else constitute a mental health emergency.
- Other mental health changes may also be considered an emergency, such as sudden changes in behavior or experiencing confusion, can be an emergency if they occur without cause.
- Behavioral emergencies are best met by remaining calm, and encouraging the person in crisis to stay calm as well.

**3 Know that sudden changes can be emergencies.** Chemical spills, fires, breaking water pipes, electrical outages, natural disasters such as floods or fires are all examples of potential workplace emergencies. If you have advance warning of the possibility of an emergency, such the warning of flood, heavy snow, tornado, etc., you may be better prepared. However, the nature of an emergency is to be unexpected.<sup>[3]</sup>

- When assessing emergency situations, be aware that the situation may be volatile. It may change rapidly.
- If you have advance warning of an emergency, prepare ahead of time for the best results.

**4 Be alert for human-caused emergencies.** Assaults or threats of violence at a workplace or home are emergencies that call for rapid response. In most cases, there is no predictable pattern or method to these emergencies. These situations tend to be unpredictable, and they change quickly.<sup>[4]</sup>

- If you find yourself in an emergency of this nature, keep yourself safe. Run to a safe location, or find shelter in place. Do not fight, except as a last resort.
- Being attentive to warning signs in your workplace, including any act of physical violence (pushing, shoving, etc.) should be immediately reported to your supervisor.
- Open, honest communication between employees and supervisors is part of maintaining a safe, healthy workplace.

**5 Assess the immediate threat.** For example, if one person appears injured, are you or anyone else in danger of also being injured? For example, if one person is caught in a machine, is the machine turned off? If there has been a chemical spill, is the spill spreading towards anyone else? Is the person caught in structure that's collapsing?<sup>[5]</sup>

- If the threat isn't contained, this will affect your response.
- Be aware that any emergency situation may change abruptly, so that ongoing assessment is required.

**6 Remove yourself from danger.** If you, or others, are at risk of being harmed, leave the situation immediately. If you have an evacuation plan, follow it. Go to an area where you will be safe.

- In a situation where you cannot leave, find the safest possible location within your given area. For example, hiding beneath a solid surface, such as a desk or table, may help if there is a chance of being hit by falling debris.
- If you're near a car accident, make sure you're not in the line of oncoming traffic. Get off the road.
- Be aware that in an emergency, elements are likely to change quickly. In your assessment, notice if volatile or combustible elements are present. For example, in an auto accident, gasoline may catch fire abruptly.

**7 Help others leave a hazardous area.** If you can safely assist someone else in leaving a dangerous situation, do so. If returning to the emergency situation is risky, a trained rescue person may be better equipped to retrieve anyone in harm's way.<sup>[6]</sup>

- Offering verbal reassurance to an injured person if he is conscious will help another person, even if you can't move him.
- If the emergency is stable, stay with the victim.

**8 Seek additional help.** In the USA, call 911 for emergency assistance. Use whatever number is applicable to call [emergency services](#) outside the U.S. This phone number will reach a emergency dispatcher who will need to know your location and the nature of the emergency.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Answer all of the questions the dispatcher asks. The job of the dispatcher is to provide quick, appropriate emergency response. She can only do this by asking these questions.
- If you're calling on a traditional telephone or a GPS-equipped cell phone, emergency services may be able to track your location even if you're unable to speak. Even if you can't talk, call emergency services and someone will be able to find you to provide help.

## Method 2

### Handling the Emergency

**1 Determine if you can do anything to help.** The most important thing you can do is to remain calm, and stay in control of the situation. Sometimes there is nothing that you can do, and that's fine. Don't be worried about admitting that there's nothing you can do to help.<sup>[8]</sup>

- If there are others on the scene who may be upset or fearful, reassure them. Employ them in going to get help.
- It's better to remain with someone in a supportive way than to do an action that may result in additional damage. If you're not sure what to do, simply stay with the person.

**2 Take time to think before acting.** Being in an emergency situation can result in panicked thinking and actions. Instead of reacting to a situation, take time to calm down. Breathe deeply before you take any action.<sup>[9]</sup>

- Things change suddenly in emergency situations. Don't panic if things suddenly go in a different direction than

you'd expected.

- Take time to pause whenever you're overwhelmed, panicky or confused. If you need to stop in the middle of taking an action to calm down, that's okay.

**3 Get the first aid kit.** A first aid kit should have constructive tools for taking care of many medical emergencies. Any first aid kit should contain bandages, gauze, adhesive tape, disinfectant, and other useful items.<sup>[10]</sup>

- If you can't retrieve the first aid kit, consider what other items in your immediate vicinity might be good substitutes.
- You should keep a first aid kit at your home, and your workplace is required by law to maintain a first aid kit.
- A good first aid kit should also have a "space blanket" which is a light-weight piece of special material meant to conserve body heat.

**4 Ask basic questions of the injured person.** It's important to discern the mental state of the victim in order to better understand the person's injuries. If the person appears confused by the question, or provides the wrong answer, this may suggest additional injuries. If you're not sure if the victim is unconscious, touch their shoulder. Shout or ask loudly, "Are you okay?"<sup>[11]</sup>

- Questions you should ask include: What is your name? What is the date? How old are you?
- Once you've determined the basic mental status of the person, check with them about any medical complications. Ask them if they have a medical alert bracelet or another medical ID.

**5 Avoid moving an injured person.** If someone has a neck injury, moving him could result in injuring the spine. Always call emergency services if someone has a neck injury and is unable to move himself.<sup>[12]</sup>

- If the person can't walk because of leg or foot injuries, you can help move them by holding them at the shoulders.
- If the person is afraid to leave a dangerous situation, respond with reassurance.

**6 Use the telephone only to ask for help.** Your full attention should be on the present situation, and talking on the phone is distracting. In addition, if you are on an older model telephone, the emergency dispatcher may be trying to reach you. Stay off the phone unless you're calling to ask for help.<sup>[13]</sup>

- If you're not sure if you're in a true emergency, call emergency services and the dispatcher can help you figure out if emergency officials should be sent.
- Don't try to document the emergency unless you are sure you are out of danger. Taking "selfies" or posting about your situation on social media in ongoing emergency situations may result in additional injury.

Method  
3

### Being Prepared

**1 Have an emergency plan.** The best response in an emergency situation is to follow the emergency plan of your home or workplace. Certain people may be identified as emergency leaders, with special training. In an emergency, you will save necessary time and energy by following the plan.<sup>[14]</sup>

- Your emergency plan should have an assembly place to gather once you've evacuated the home or building.
- Keep emergency phone numbers posted near the phone.
- Important medical data should be stored in your phone or your wallet.

**2 Know your physical address.** You'll need to know your location in order to tell any emergency dispatcher where to send help. While it may be easy to know the address of your home, it's also important to memorize the address of your workplace. Get into the habit of checking the address wherever you are.<sup>[15]</sup>

- If you don't know the physical address, be ready to say the name of the street you're on and any nearby intersections or landmarks.
- If your cell phone has GPS, you can use it to determine your physical address. However, this wastes much needed time in an emergency.

**3 Identify your closest exits.** Always be aware of the exits to any building you're in, whether they're home, office, or commercial locations. Identify at least 2 exits, in case one is blocked. In a workplace or public location, exits should be clearly marked.<sup>[16]</sup>

- Choose two places where you can regather with your family or coworkers. One location should be outside the home or workplace. The other location should be outside the immediate vicinity, in case the neighborhood is unsafe.
- Emergency exits should be physically accessible, according to ADA laws.

**4 Take a first aid course.** Having a first aid kit isn't helpful unless you have training to use it. Having training to properly apply bandages, compresses, tourniquets and other tools will help in an emergency. The Red Cross regularly offers these courses in most areas of the US.<sup>[17]</sup>

- Many Red Cross courses are also offered online.
- First aid courses can be age specific. If you have children, or just want to know how to help children in case of an emergency, take a first aid course specific to assisting children in an emergency. If you work with children, you'll be required by law to receive this training.

**5 Consider taking CPR in addition to first aid.** Having CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) training is a life-saving help for someone having a heart attack. If you haven't taken a CPR course, you can still offer chest compressions for someone suspected of having a heart attack.<sup>[18]</sup>

- A chest compression is hard pressure applied swiftly to the ribcage at the rate of 100 compressions per minute, or just over 1 per second.
- CPR for children and infants is taught by the Red Cross. If you have children, take a course in providing CPR for children in order to be prepared in case of an emergency. If you work with children, you may be required by law to receive this training.

**6 Know what chemicals are found in your home or workplace.** If the emergency occurs in your workplace, you should know where to find the MSDS (Material Data Safety Sheet) for any chemical used. Having a list of the chemicals used in your home or workplace, together with any first aid measures required in case of emergency, will be the most effective way you can prepare for emergency situations.<sup>[19]</sup>

- Your workplace should have an eyewash station if you regularly come into contact with hazardous chemicals.
- Make sure you are prepared to share any relevant information regarding chemicals with your emergency response team.

**7 Keep emergency phone numbers posted near the phone.** Post the number for 911 as well as other important medical phone numbers, including the phone numbers of family members who should be contacted. The phone number of the poison control center, ambulance center, your doctors' phone numbers should be posted alongside contact numbers of neighbors or nearby friends or relatives, and work phone numbers.<sup>[20]</sup>

- All members of your house, including your children, should be able to access these phone numbers in case of an emergency.
- For children, elderly or disabled people, consider having a posted script to help them remember what to tell others when calling on the phone with an emergency situation.

**8 Wear a medical ID tag if you have a chronic health condition.** If you have a condition that a medical response team should be aware of, such as diabetes, certain allergies, epilepsy or other seizure disorder, or other medical conditions, a medical ID tag can provide this information should you be unable to.<sup>[21]</sup>

- Most medical responders look on a person's wrist for medical ID tags. The second most common place to look

is at the person's neck, as a necklace.

- People with certain behavioral conditions, such as Tourette syndrome, autism, dementia, etc., may wish to consider wearing medical ID badges to help any emergency responder better understand their behavior.

## Community Q&A

### What should I do if I am a victim of child abuse?

wikiHow Contributor  
Call the police if you are in physical danger. Even if you can't talk to them, they may hear you screaming or they will send help. If you are dealing with mental or emotional abuse, talk to a school counselor or trusted adult to help you get out of the abusive situation.

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### What if a very heavy object falls on someone's hip?

wikiHow Contributor  
Remove the object carefully. Then talk to the person to determine whether or not they are injured. If so, call an ambulance.

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### What can I do to be prepared for an emergency response at school and home?

wikiHow Contributor  
Take a CPR/first aid course to be more prepared for emergency medical situations at school and home. You can also keep earthquake/natural disaster kits in your home and school stocked with food, water, and medication in case of a disaster.

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### What are some ways to improve my odds of survival in an emergency situation?

wikiHow Contributor  
Have an overall healthy lifestyle (eat healthy, work out and get lots of sleep); learn basic first aid; make sure at least one person knows where you are at all times; always carry money for public transport; have a phone at all times; and always check where the nearest hospital is when staying anywhere for longer than two days (especially when buying or renting a house).

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### What are some examples of situations where someone would need to call 911?

wikiHow Contributor  
Any medical event that could be at all serious or life-threatening, a blow to the head, a bad cut, a heart attack, etc. You would also want to call in case of fire, or a crime being committed, if your house was broken into, you were mugged, assaulted, etc.

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### How can I prevent an emergency?

wikiHow Contributor  
Educate yourself on fire, kitchen and electricity safety. If you are going anywhere, from a hike to a party to a date with someone new, let someone know about your plans and set a time for that person to check in if he hasn't heard from you. This is especially important when alcohol is involved. Half of those who drown had alcohol in their blood at the time of the accident and similar statistics are true for hypothermia. When using chemicals such as laundry detergent, chlorine and other harsh substances, thoroughly read and follow the instructions, such as keep them out of reach for children and pets, or what surfaces not to use them on. Check your smoke detector.

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## Tips

- Make sure everyone in your home or workplace knows where first aid kits are kept.
- Keep a first aid kit in your car.
- You may wish to have an out-of-area emergency contact, in case all local phone lines are full.

## Warnings

- Never move someone with a neck injury.
- Don't place a pillow under the head of someone who's unconscious, as this might result in spinal injury.
- Don't hang up on an emergency dispatcher until you're told it's okay to do so.

- Never give an unconscious person food or drink.
- Don't leave workplace doors propped open. Emergency exits should open from the inside, preventing unauthorized people to enter.

### Sources and Citations

1. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-gail-gross/staying-calm-during-an-em\\_b\\_7749812.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-gail-gross/staying-calm-during-an-em_b_7749812.html)
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